



In Search of Our
Best Life:

Marshall's Sausage Stand

Half the fun of eating a gourmet sausage is where you eat it. At noon on a bright Saturday, I'm at Marshall Drummond's grill on the corner of Highway 18 and Railway Avenue in Val Marie, Saskatchewan. A group of ranchers makes room for me on the bench, and we munch our lunch to the soothing strains of Hank Williams as we look out over the buttes.



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◀ Captions



Whether you are a foodie looking for a new gourmet experience, a hungry visitor to the Grasslands National Park, or a local farmer on your way back to the field, Marshall's stand is worth stopping for. Modelled on the Mexican cantina, his open-air kitchen has a rustic simplicity and an off-beat charm. Open three days a week, for dinner and supper, from mid-June to Rodeo weekend in September, Marshall's promises to pack lot of character into a meal.

"Dinner," by the way, means lunch-time in these parts. The first time Marshall and his wife, Maura Byrne, were invited to the neighbor's for dinner, their host called at noon to ask where they were. The couple are "out-of-towners," in the local vernacular, most recently from Calgary, where Marshall worked for a decade as a tour bus guide and instructor with Brewster Coaches in the Rockies. They fell in love with the prairies after they began to explore the countryside south and west of Calgary in an old camper van. Of their little Highway 18 haven, says Marshall, "We just discovered this empty space that was so accessible, so private and so wondrous in its offerings."

With the buttes on their doorstep and the Frenchman River beyond the windows, the couple set out to enjoy "retirement." "We don't call it retirement," he says. "We call it second childhood. Just being kids again."

"In search of our best life," Maura adds.

For Marshall, that search encompasses a lifetime of interesting jobs—from sign-maker, salesman, guide and businessman to teacher and



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poet. He went back to school late in life, and now holds a degree in science and history—interests sparked by his decade as a tour guide. After moving to Val Marie, Marshall upgraded the house, moved Maura’s printmaking studio from Calgary, and began to renovate an old cinderblock building. “The Cinder Block” is the cornerstone of Marshall’s sausage stand, and the future home of a summer gallery that will house the couple’s art collection.

Both Marshall and Maura are keen collectors of Canadian memorabilia. This weekend, which happens to be rodeo weekend in Val Marie, Marshall displays an assortment of china bison and rodeo mementos. He sports a black western shirt and a string tie with a scorpion medallion. The front of the Cinder Block is decorated with portraits of fields in harvest, running horses, and a pleasingly kitschy photo of a cowgirl and her palomino.

His enthusiasm and his sense of fun aside, Marshall has a serious interest in local history. “The history of this area is very interesting,” he says. “Did you know, Major James Walsh, of the North West Mounted Police, first met with Sitting Bull at his



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← Captions

camp near Pinto Butte?" He points to a rise in the land just north-east of his stand.

Growing up in Ontario cottage country, "all resorts and summer fun and lakes and rivers," was what first nurtured his love and interest in nature. "It was all about birds and fish, tadpoles and turtles," he says.

The beauty of the Grasslands was what drew the couple here, but the idea for the sausage stand was developed over a number of years. In Calgary, he was fond of visiting Spolumbo's Deli, a trendy lunch spot run by three former Calgary Stampeder. "I told them I wanted to open a sausage stand in the Grasslands. I left them an owl feather, as a symbol of the place. They still have it in their office."

He is pleased by the local response to his stand, and enjoys filling a community need. He gets fresh buns from a local Mennonite bakery, and shops at the village grocery store. The gourmet sausage is from Spolumbo's. The local kids call Fridays, "Spolumbo's Fridays." They bike over for lunch and to shoot the breeze under the trees with the tourists and ranchers gathered there.

Operating his stand for limited hours on the weekends means he has time to hike, attend farm auctions, and visit friends, some of his favorite pastimes. It also means he has the time to get to know his customers, and his knowledge of local history means people tend to linger after lunch.

Recently a couple of cross-Canada cyclists took a detour to Val Marie. They shared their personal stories with Marshall, and he introduced them to Maura, who gave them a tour of her art studio. Conversation turned to creativity and finding purpose in life—subjects that resonate with the couple.

"People end up staying and getting something special," he says, grinning. That extra "something" is sometimes served up in subtle ways. One local rancher comes for the music, a special mix of country and western that Marshall creates especially for the cantina.

As I finish my sausage and enjoy the view of the buttes, I think Waylon Jennings and Hank Snow never sounded so "at home" as at Marshall's Sausage Stand.

